REMARKS BY MARIANNE LAMONT HORINKO
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- I was named to head the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency just a few weeks ago
  - -- Since then my friends and colleagues have given me a lot of good advice about how to handle the job
  - -- One of the most important things they've told me is: never let a speech stand between a hungry audience and their supper
  - -- You've all put in a long day here, and no doubt are anxious to move on to the more social aspects of today's summit meeting
  - -- So I will keep my remarks brief
- In all the history of technological advance, there have been only a handful of instances when a new idea has marked an unmistakable and instantaneous change from everything that has come before
  - -- When an innovation stands like a bright line between past and future, and alters the way we think about ourselves and the world we live in
  - -- One such instance is that remarkable photograph of the Earth taken from space back in the late 1960s
  - -- In that now-familiar photo, the Earth looks like a blue pebble floating in space – small, beautiful, fragile
  - -- There, for the first time, we saw our Earth, our common home, as a single, self-contained, indivisible whole
    - -- No political boundaries could be seen

-- Nothing even to suggest that the planet was inhabited and being altered by the creatures living there

-- Just that single planet seen from a point of view, a perspective, never before possible

$ That photograph dramatically altered human appreciation of the natural environment

-- It showed that we are all part of a single, interconnected web of life

-- We knew, the minute we saw it, that whatever happens to this planet in the future will happen to all of us together, no matter where we live

$ There is a direct line, I believe, between that photograph and this meeting

-- For the first time in history, the nations of the world are coming together to design an international, integrated plan to measure critical aspects of the global environment

-- This is historic, unprecedented, and a huge challenge to all of us

$ To succeed, we need information, lots of information

-- The Earth Observation System promises to bring together better information, from more sources, than ever before in history

-- That will demand an extraordinary level of political and technical cooperation

$ But the real meaning, the real value, of this project lies beyond the collection of enormous amounts of data, as important as that may be

-- It goes beyond developing the tools that government officials need to make good decisions

-- It goes to the heart of the relationships between people and their governments

-- It goes to the heart of peaceful, cooperative societies

-- We learned this in the United States as we developed the laws and institutions needed to protect the environment here

-- And it explains why I believe the Earth Observation System is so important to people living everywhere on this good Earth

$ The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was formed back in 1970

-- From the very beginning we knew that information would be the key to our success

--Information about how natural systems worked

-- Information about the relative health of ecosystems, especially trends in ecosystem health over time

-- Information about the kinds and levels of man-made pollutants present in the environment

-- Eventually we needed the same kind of information about human health, and the effects that different pollutants could have on human health

$ Over the past three decades the United States has invested an enormous amount of time and energy collecting information, information essential to making good decisions

-- Along the way we've learned that information can provide three kinds of benefits beyond their usefulness to government agencies

-- I am convinced these same benefits can be, and will be, derived from the Earth Observation System

$ First, information helps people understand why environmental problems are important, and why they should care about solving them

-- Pollutants in the air and water are not abstract risks that somebody else in a government office should worry about

-- They pose real risks to real people in their home towns and back yards

-- People need to know that, because their lives and health, their future and their children's future, are at stake

$ Information also lets people know when those risks have been reduced, when the world is cleaner and healthier because actions have been taken

-- A few weeks ago EPA released a Draft Report on the quality of the environment in the United States

-- This report compiles in one place the best available information on current environmental conditions, and trends in those conditions over the past 30 years

-- Today the air the United States is cleaner than it was three decades ago, and life has returned to many rivers and streams that were virtually dead years ago

-- After 30 years of collecting data, there are still gaps in our knowledge

-- We still have a lot more to learn, for example, about conditions in our watersheds

-- But without data, we wouldn't understand how much we've accomplished, or how much more we have to do

-- Without data, we couldn't measure either our problems or our progress

$ I mention our environmental record here in the United States not simply because my country is very proud of it

-- But because it demonstrates one of the ways information is valuable

to the general population

-- Information helps people understand risk, and it helps them understand success

-- Information enlarges human understanding in important ways, and this is one of the main benefits that I expect will flow from the Earth Observation System

$ All of us who work in government agencies appreciate the importance of information when we need to make decisions

-- Without good information, our hands would be tied

-- But there is even more to be gained if we open up our use of information, and our decisionmaking processes in general, to public view

-- In the United States this is sometimes called the "sunshine policy"

-- Decisions that touch everyone's lives are made in the bright light of day, so everyone understands not only what has been decided but why

-- In this way, the transparent use of information in government decisions leads to public trust

-- And greater public trust is another of the benefits that will flow from the Earth Oberserving System

$ The collection of information would be only an academic exercise if the information were not widely shared

-- I applaud you for your insistence that the information collected through the Earth Observation System be made widely available to as many people as possible

-- Not just scientists, not just governments, not just technical

experts, but everyone with an interest in the health of the globe should have access to everything that is known

-- People with access to information will support the sometimes inconvenient, expensive, and controversial actions that must be taken to protect the environment

-- In some cases, in fact, people have to change their own personal or family behavior

  -- People will not make sacrifices in their own lives, or insist that businesses and governments change, unless they know why

  -- And they won't know why without information

-- Public access to information leads to stronger public support for the actions that communities, or governments, or businesses may have to take to protect the environment

-- One of this country's founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, spoke eloquently on the importance of public access to information, and public involvement in decisionmaking

  -- He said: "I know of no safe depository of the utimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to INFORM their discretion."

$ To sum up, the collection of information leads to <u>public understanding</u>, the the transparent use of information in decision making leads to <u>public trust</u>, and broad access to information leads to <u>public support</u>

-- Understanding, trust, support: these are the benefits that flow from

environmental information

-- And these are the benefits we can expect when the Earth Observations System is in place

$ Let me close by thanking all of you for attending this conference, and for bringing your collective vision and wisdom to the table

-- I especially want to thank Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher of NOAA for his tireless, personal efforts in support of this conference

-- As you return to your homes, you will begin the hard work of putting this integrated system together, and then putting it to work

-- I hope you are energized by the fact that today marks the start of an extraordinary venture, a truly world-wide project to better understand, and better protect, that blue pebble spinning in space

-- You are building a global partnership to protect the global community

  -- You're strengthening the human ties that link all people everywhere

-- Through information, you will inspire a deeper human understanding of who we are and where we live

-- Through information, you will nurture a faith in political consensus-building and public support for consensus-based action

-- Through information, you will encourage a greater trust among people and their governments everywhere

$ This is indeed an important occasion

-- But history will only remember it if our plans bear fruit

-- I wish all of you, all of <u>us</u>, the best of luck